

HOW TO... Download software quickly

Downloading large files such as programs often takes time, but if you use BitTorrent you can download software without waiting around, as Matt Chapman explains

ON THE COVER DISC These days, faster home internet connections mean faster downloads. But even broadband can take a while to download large software files measuring in megabytes or even gigabytes.

If you want to download software quickly and easily, BitTorrent can help. It is a file-sharing system that relies on cooperation between users to share files as fast as possible. If other users have the file on their computer and are willing to share it, you can tap into their web connection's upload capacity to take a copy for yourself. Once you've started to download the program, other people can download it from your computer.

This system has an element of fair play about it. You can get a good download speed only if you're willing to give a good upload speed. Allowing the sharing of a file from your computer is called seeding. The practice of downloading a file but refusing to seed it afterwards is called snatching and is frowned upon by the BitTorrent community.

You'll find BitTorrent on this month's cover disc. See also our 'Top 20 Utilities' feature on page 130 for more details about the program.

1 Once it is installed, go to the Windows Programs menu and choose BitTorrent. Then select Downloader.

2 Before you can download a file, you need to find a link to it. There are a number of places that you can search, such as www.torrentspy.com and www.seedler.org. The latest version of BitTorrent also includes a search function. Alternatively, you can go straight to the BitTorrent search page, which is found at <http://search.bittorrent.com>.

3 The page you open should contain information about how many people are sharing the file. The more people who are allowing the file to be downloaded from their computer, the quicker it will be. Look for files with a high number of seeders (people who share) and a low number of leeches (those who just download). Once you have found a good source, make sure BitTorrent is still running and look for an obvious link that says Download or DL Torrent. Click that link to begin downloading.

4 When you look at the BitTorrent software, a new line should have been added to it. This contains relevant information about the download. The line running across the box gradually fills up with green so you can see the progress. The text running across that line also tells you what percentage has downloaded and how long the whole program will take based on the current download speed.

You can set your maximum upload rate using the sliding scale on the line above. This determines how much of your bandwidth is used up by people downloading the file from your computer. If you set your upload limits too low, it will affect the speed at which the file can be downloaded. However, if you offer all your upload capacity, you may find it impossible to surf the net while downloading takes place.

It is possible to have more than one download running at the same time. Right-click the clock icon next to the download bar and choose Download Now from the menu.

If you have more than one file downloading at the same time, you can use the arrow button to reorder them. Left-click the arrow icon and drag a file further down the list.

PORT FORWARDING AT A GLANCE

■ A broadband router creates a firewall between your computer and the internet. This is great for security but not so good when you're trying to use your computer as a game server, ftp server, web server and so forth. Port forwarding is a way of getting around this. It creates a tunnel through the firewall so that people on the internet can talk to your PC.

■ If BitTorrent doesn't work, you may need to open up one of your ports. How you do this can vary according to your router model. Go to www.portforward.com and click on Forwarding. In the first screen, select your router. In the second screen, select the task you want to perform. Then follow the step-by-step instructions.

Release the left mouse button when it is in the position you want. This changes the priority of the downloads – the most important should be top of the list.

5 To set limits on how long a file is seeded, open the View menu on the BitTorrent Window and choose Settings.

6 Click the Seeding tab at the top of the Settings window to view those options. The defaults are set to seed completed files until 80 per cent of their size has been distributed to other users, or until six hours has passed. However, the last file is set to seed as long as BitTorrent is still active, so you might want to uncheck the box next to Seed Indefinitely.

